

**Learning to Walk the Sacred Paths: *A Lenten Journey with Mapping the Sacred***  
**Lent 1: *The Path of Soul***

An inconspicuous phrase inserts itself at the beginning of today's gospel that is easy to miss if we hurry past it.

It says: "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness."

Led.

Not abandoned.

Not punished.

Not sent away in shame.

Led.

Which means the wilderness is not the opposite of God. It is sometimes exactly where God brings us.

And that matters , because many of us have learned, without realizing it, to believe something very different.

We've learned to believe that if life feels silent, uncertain, or empty, something must be wrong. That we must have lost our way, or lost God, or failed somehow.

But this story tells us something startling.

Sometimes the most faithful place you can be is not clarity.  
Not productivity. Not certainty.

Sometimes the most faithful place you can be is simply...  
still.

And that is where our Lenten journey begins.

Because underneath all our spiritual questions lies a  
quieter one:

Can I simply be with God?

Today we begin something new together, though in truth it  
is also something very old.

Over these weeks of Lent, we will be exploring a  
framework called *Mapping the Sacred*. This is a  
framework I created with my friend and colleague in  
spiritual direction Rev Dr Tom Harris. We identified nine  
spiritual pathways or “types” that help people better  
understand and illuminate their connection to the Divine.  
During Lent we will be exploring these Paths.

Mapping the Sacred builds on what is ancient and evolving  
in Christian spirituality and beyond.

The Church has always wrestled with how human beings  
encounter God.

From the desert mystics...  
to medieval theologians...

to reformers...

to modern spiritual directors...

Christians have always asked the same question in different ways:

How do people actually experience God?

This framework grows out of that long conversation.

What began for me years ago as work with four spiritual types has, over time, expanded as I listened more carefully to people's lived experience, to their stories, their struggles, their ways of praying, their ways of seeing the world.

And what I discovered is this:

No single way of encountering God fits everyone.

So these categories have grown. They continue to grow.

They are not finished.

They are not fixed.

Your insights matter.

Your feedback helps refine them.

Because this is not a system handed down from on high.

It is a shared map, one we are drawing together as we walk.

## **What We Mean by “Spiritual Types”**

It is also important to be very clear about what we mean by this idea of spiritual types.

The goal is not to change your spirituality.

It is not to tell you how you should pray, or what you should become.

These Paths are not labels; they are invitations, gentle ways of noticing how your soul most naturally turns toward God, and how God may already be meeting you there.

Think of it like temperament.

Or personality.

Or even musical taste.

Some people are drawn to jazz.

Some to classical.

Some even to country.

Some to silence.

None of these is better than another.

They simply reflect different ways of hearing.

And so it is with spirituality. Each path carries gifts. Each path carries shadows. Most of us are not purely one type.

We carry several within us, with one or two that tend to be dominant, like a home language of the soul.

*Mapping the Sacred* simply helps us notice those patterns. And when we notice them, something begins to change. We become more compassionate toward ourselves. More curious about others. And more open to the many ways God is at work.

## **The First Path: The Path of the Soul**

And so today, we begin with what we call: *The Path of the Soul*.

This is the spirituality of presence.

Of stillness.

Of mystery.

It is rooted in the conviction that God is encountered not primarily through words or action, but through awareness.

Through attentiveness.

Through simply being.

For some people, this path feels like home. They are comfortable with silence. They notice God in small, quiet moments: light through a window, wind moving through trees, the hush of a room where someone is grieving.

They are not frightened by paradox. They do not panic when prayer feels empty. They understand Scripture not only as something to analyze, but as a doorway into encountering the Divine.

These are the mystics. The listeners. The watchers. And their gift to the Church is profound.

They bring depth, discernment, a reminder that God is not merely an idea to be explained, but a presence to be experienced.

This is why the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness.

Because the wilderness is where the soul is formed.

Not through activity.

Not through achievement.

But through presence.

In the wilderness, Jesus faces temptations that are not really about morality. They are about something deeper. Each temptation offers him a way to escape vulnerability.

Turn stones into bread — eliminate need.

Leap from the temple — demand certainty.

Claim the kingdoms — replace relationship with power.

Each temptation whispers the same invitation:

“Don’t just be the Beloved. Prove it.”

And Jesus refuses. Again and again. Because he understands something essential.

The deepest life of the soul cannot be secured through control.

It can only be lived through trust.

The *Path of the Soul* does not speak in tidy explanations.

It speaks in silence. In poetry. In paradox.

It is the language of Elijah discovering God not in wind or fire, but in a sound of sheer silence.

It is the language of the Desert Mothers and Fathers, who withdrew into wilderness to learn how to listen more deeply.

It is the language of the great mystic Thomas Merton, who wrote that contemplation awakens us to reality.

This path teaches us to trust that God is present even when nothing is happening.

That silence is not absence. That mystery is not abandonment.

But every spiritual path carries both gift and risk.

The strength of the Path of the Soul is depth.

Attentiveness.

Discernment.

The shadow is withdrawal. Silence can become isolation. Mystery can become avoidance.

That is why Jesus does not remain in the wilderness forever. He leaves. He enters community. He begins ministry.

Because this path is not meant to replace engagement with the world. It is meant to ground it.

It is a well we draw from, not a place we hide in.

## **Why This Path Matters Now**

We live in a world deeply uncomfortable with stillness.

We fill every moment with noise. Notifications. Conversations. Urgency (real or constructed).

Even spirituality can become another form of busyness. Another performance. Another place where we inwardly believe we must prove our worth rather than receive our belovedness.

But beneath all that activity, many people carry a quiet exhaustion. A longing not for more information, but for wisdom. A hunger not for more answers, but for peace.

And a deep, often unspoken desire simply to rest in a presence that does not demand anything of them, and whispers in the deepest valleys of their souls, “You are enough. You are beloved.”

And that is why this first step of Lent matters.

Because before we do anything else, we must learn to stop.

To breathe.

To trust that God’s presence does not depend on our productivity.

So this is where we begin.

With the simplest, hardest practice of all.

Presence.

This week, the invitation is gentle.

Spend a few minutes each day in silence. Not trying to pray correctly. Not trying to feel spiritual.

Just sitting. Breathing. And quietly asking: “God, can I simply be with you?”

And when your mind wanders — and it will — just return.

Again and again.

Because the Path of the Soul is not about achieving stillness. It is about practicing return, return to the One

who created and animates the Universe, and lives deep within the human soul.

At the end of this story, we are told:

“The devil left him, and angels came and waited on him.”

Which means the wilderness was never empty. It only appeared so.

And this is the deep truth of the Path of the Soul:

Silence is not absence. Stillness is not abandonment.  
Mystery is not emptiness.

The wilderness is full of God.

So as we begin this Lenten journey...As we begin Mapping the Sacred ways human beings encounter God...

We start here.

In the quiet. In the wilderness.

In the simple, holy practice of presence.

Because before we learn how to act for God...

Before we learn how to speak about God...

Before we learn how to serve the world...

We must learn something deeper.

How to remain and be still.

How to trust that even in silence, we are not alone.

How to walk the first path.

And this is the surprising good news of the wilderness: It is never as empty as it feels. God is already there before we arrive. Even in the dry places, even in the waiting, even in the long quiet, we are still the Beloved, held and accompanied by a Presence that does not leave.

*The Path of the Soul.*

Amen.